

DR. TRISH LEIGH

MIND OVER



EXPLICIT

MATTER

QUIT PORN AND
IMPROVE INTIMACY THROUGH
NEUROSCIENCE

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NEUROSCIENCE**

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Mind Over Explicit Matter

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The information presented in this book is the result of years of practice experience and clinical research by the author. The information in this book, by necessity, is general in nature and is not a substitute for an evaluation or treatment by a competent health care specialist. If you believe you need medical intervention, please see a professional as soon as possible. While the stories in the book are

true, names and identifying characteristics of some individuals have been changed to preserve their privacy.

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To Sam

Your struggle and success have taught us both so much.

We are both better because of it.

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Introduction

As you read this, you may be at a crossroads, trying to determine whether it's worth the effort to give up porn. You might wonder whether you even *can* succeed at leaving porn behind. Unwanted, secret sexual behaviors may have you stuck feeling anxious, unfocused, and with your mind constantly pulling you back to sexual thoughts. Maybe you find some comfort knowing that you are not the only one who struggles with this issue. Or perhaps you feel the shame of discovery, the discomfort of realizing your habit's impact on those you care about most, or the pain that you may even be hurting yourself. Maybe you feel relief in having taken the first step toward freedom by picking up this book. If you are ready to leave the pull of porn behind and step into a purposeful, fulfilling life, then this book is for you. No matter where you are on your journey, I am glad you're here.

In this book, I want to take you on an adventure to find the Real You—the person you innately know you are, deep down inside. That person is strong, independent, vital, and healthy. That person is who you have always wanted to be; that person no longer has their life hijacked by addiction, trauma, or fear. The path to self-discovery does not have to involve running away from pain, but rather running *toward* purpose. It can propel you into authentic living, joy, and happiness. I know this type of transformation can happen. I have experienced it myself and have seen it happen to my clients.

As a cognitive neuroscientist, brain-health coach, neurofeedback provider, communication pathologist, and certified sex addiction recovery coach, I have dedicated my life to helping people heal their brains and overcome porn addiction. I help individuals just like you every single day. I

will not sugarcoat it: this journey can be a winding and rocky road packed with potential stumbles and setbacks. But if you set your mind to it, you will join countless others at the apex of a most worthwhile expedition of radical personal transformation.

Our voyage will be grounded in science, research, and professional expertise in addition to stories and anecdotes of others who have escaped porn's clutches. This will help you process and integrate the information along the way. Knowledge is power; once you know *how* something works and *why* it works, you will be inspired and empowered toward positive change.

This book has something for everyone. If you are married or in a committed, long-term relationship, the experiential vignettes will include some of the relationship dynamics that can be upset by porn addiction. There is also a dedicated section for those not in a relationship (whether by design or not), and the personal takeaways will be applicable for you too.

If you're a religious person and want to leave porn for moral reasons, the principles in this book align with the spiritual beliefs of the world's predominant religions. Recovery, in and of itself, is a spiritual journey. However, I will incorporate personally meaningful transformational concepts with neuroscience at every step of the process. If you are not religious, this book is still for you.

Although compulsive porn use impacts more men than women, evidence suggests that since the internet came on the scene, problematic porn use has been closing the gender gap.^{[1](#)} So, if you are a woman struggling with porn and masturbation, there is a dedicated section for you, but rest assured that the lessons and exercises throughout are effective for women too.

I took my first step toward learning about personal transformation when I returned to university for my doctoral studies. I signed up for a self-

development training program, like the one I offer in this book, and I worked with a coach to discover and foster my talents, reprogramming my mind and ultimately reducing my undesirable habits while embracing life in the present. Along the way, I learned that fear is the driving force of survival, and in times of stress, it can lead us into thoughts and behaviors that do not represent our highest selves. I knew then that I wanted to leverage my education and experience to help others free themselves from destructive behaviors and embrace their authentic selves.

After meeting with clients struggling with porn addiction, I began learning about the neurological components behind it, and it terrified me. At first, I struggled with sharing the information, much less making it part of my life's work, because of how it might be received. I knew that I could be chastised for talking about porn or lumped in with others who speak about the topic self-righteously. But the more I learned about the dangers of porn, the more I realized I could not remain silent and sit on the sidelines. So, I stepped out and began developing tools that have been proven to help people conquer porn addiction for themselves.

The irony is that the road to becoming a sex addiction coach helped *me* immeasurably. It has grounded me in the most personalized, authentic version of myself, rather than the inflated, false version I made long ago. Book-smart but closed off was how I survived in the world for too many years. Starting at a young age, as one of six children, I recognized my emotional needs weren't going to be taken care of by others, so I learned to have very few of them. I wore a persona of strength and intelligence to make myself feel safe, secure, and valued among my family members. In my sex addiction training, I dared to look at the parts of me that needed healing and embarked on an astounding transformative process. In doing so, the journey has done for me what I hope it can do for you, and it has solidified this as part of my purpose in life.

Not only that, but I also recognized that, because of the taboo nature of porn, I would receive more ridicule than praise for sharing what I learned about porn use. I felt like I had a burning secret that I couldn't keep inside

anymore, even if it made some people uncomfortable. There is a tsunami of porn addiction upon us, impacting millions of people worldwide and by extension their health, work, vitality, and relationships. Hiding behind the mask of “I’m fine” lie the harmful effects of porn addiction. Effects that have the potential to destroy a person unless they do something about it.

I call my approach Mind Over Explicit Matter. It is a strategy I have developed through my work with thousands of people from all over the world who have participated in my program. It is a holistic, step-by-step course to help people heal their brains and end their porn addiction. The approach consists of a combination of four therapeutic disciplines synergized for high levels of recovery success: neuromodulation, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness, and positive psychology. Each piece is scientifically proven to be effective, and I have seen true transformational power through their coalescence.² It is a neuro-bio-psycho-social approach that addresses your brain, body, mind, and relationships.

In [part 1](#) of this book, I will share the “brain basics” you need to understand for [part 2](#), where we will discuss how to unwire your brain from porn and quit it successfully. This includes information about how your brain works and how healing takes place through the wonders of neuroplasticity, which refers to the brain’s ability to change itself. This will allow you to feel better and perform at higher levels. Then, in [part 3](#), I will give you the steps to build off that knowledge base so you can rewire your brain to move forward with all the neuroscience techniques, strategies, and tools you need to build the life you have always desired. “Brain hacks” are scattered throughout the text to help you apply the ideas directly to your particular situation. I recommend that you have a journal handy so that you can process and apply the strategies to your life with greater ease. [Part 4](#) of the book helps you to hardwire the new, healthier brain performance pattern permanently to allow you to sustain a life of integrity and healthy sexuality. To overcome porn addiction, you must unwire your brain and its self-sabotaging habits before you can rewire it with new, self-flourishing ones

and ultimately hardwire those changes into your brain for long-lasting success.

This book is filled with some of the best ideas I have come across in my years of study—some you won't find anywhere else. It addresses all four areas of the neuro-bio-psycho-social approach while integrating theory with practice to help you heal your brain and find the authentic version of yourself.

The key to this change is, in fact, your own mind. It is the greatest tool you use to create your life. It guides your thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions. A product of your brain's electrical performance pattern, it is the voice you hear inside your head leading you toward, or away from, healthy behaviors.

I will teach you how to use your mind in a healthier way to forge a more fulfilling life. If you follow each step, you will start observing and weighing your actions, thoughts, and inner monologue like never before. You will learn to process and understand your feelings and emotions while discerning how to be intentional in your thoughts and actions, creating meaningful goals, and, more importantly, knowing how to act upon them. Through enhanced brain performance you *can*—and *will*—establish the desire, commitment, and motivation to succeed. If you show up and do the work, I know you will leave this self-sabotaging habit behind and break the chains holding you back from your full potential.

Overcoming addiction is a serious issue. It necessitates a complex and integrated approach at three levels of your consciousness—unconscious, subconscious, and conscious—challenging you to do the following:

1. **Unconscious:** Heal your brain. You will need to adjust your brain's performance pattern, electrical energy, and flow of neurotransmitters

to break a negative habit (a downward spiral) and create a positive one (an upward spiral) in its place.

2. **Subconscious:** Resolve underlying issues of which you may not be fully aware but that are holding you back.
3. **Conscious:** Change your thought system despite having to use your distorted thought system to start that process.

The Mind Over Explicit Matter approach is designed to help you accomplish these three challenges by giving you the knowledge and action steps to heal your brain performance pattern, integrate your mind, develop healthy sexuality and communication styles, and improve your relationships. The tools in this book will help you find the most authentic realization of yourself, the identity eager to emerge from behind the false persona your ego uses to protect itself. This self is your *true Self* and is more enlightened than the self you are living as right now. You might think of this as being superconscious: living the authentic, innate aspect of yourself expressed above and beyond your current levels, stepping into the version of yourself who no longer needs to rely on the escapism of porn. This Self won't have to keep secrets anymore or feel any more shame. This Self will feel your mind and your brain working with you, not against you.

The best part about this journey is that you will not have to do it alone. You will have me to help guide you as you make this uphill trek toward the mountain's pinnacle. So congratulations on being here. I know what a commitment it is to start this journey, and I am immensely proud of you for taking this giant first step. Take time to celebrate this progress as your first small win. As you will learn in this book, celebrating small successes is critical to fruition on the journey ahead.

Change is hard. We all know that. A research study found that 55 percent of people were able to maintain personal change one year later, but only 47 percent of those trying to avoid a behavior, such as porn, were successful compared to 58 percent of those who were adding a positive behavior, such

as exercise.³ Quitting an undesirable behavior is harder. Notably, when people had some support, their success rates increased significantly. The primary reasons for relapse were lack of control, stress, and negative emotions.⁴ But I always say, “Where there is a will, there is a way,” and scientific studies support this.⁵ I will show you how to summon the will while I point to the way. It takes a healthy brain, commitment to change, discipline, and consistent execution to engage and evolve into a healthier version of yourself. But transformation is more straightforward when you have the right tools and learn how to use them. So let’s get started—together.

Part 1

Brain Basics: The Power of Knowledge

Chapter 1

Compulsive Porn Use and Hypersexuality

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

“I WATCH PORN!”

MMeet Sam. He has just turned forty-five. And he is at the top of his game. After years of barely getting by, he has recently been promoted at work after outranking every one of his colleagues in sales and customer service. There is even a plaque on the wall with his name on it. I watch as Sam pulls up in his Mercedes-Maybach convertible—black on black on black. Standing tall, lean, and confident, decked out in his designer clothes, he opens the door for Krissy, his gorgeous wife. They laugh together as they enter the building and make their way to my office. Sam gently brushes a piece of his wife’s long blonde hair from her face, and they share a smile. I invite them in, and they take a seat in my office. Sam is confident and at peace. His life seems idyllic, but we both know it wasn’t always this way.

Five years earlier, Sam had arrived at my office under very different circumstances. On that day, there was no laughter. He had sat down in that same chair but with his back bent over and his head in his hands. He was riddled with shame.

Sam is a client and friend, but I had never seen him as I did on that fateful day.

I greeted him in my usual upbeat, enthusiastic way. “Hi, Sam!” Though he raised his head slightly, he did not answer. Unusually paralyzed in the office chair, he was pale, a look of panic in his eyes. After a few more moments of silence, the words spilled out with a mix of anguish and simultaneous relief: “I watch porn!”

“Porn?” I replied with both curiosity and confusion. At that point in my career as a neurofeedback therapist, I primarily helped people overcome anxiety and attention issues using brain-training technology. I had never had a client divulge information about porn use. In fact, I hadn’t given it much thought. But then Sam shared a recent experience I have since found to be all too common in millions of homes and offices across the country, if not also the world.

A few weeks earlier, at his home, Sam was alone. Or he thought he was anyway. It was nearly dinnertime, and Krissy was working the grill outside while the rest of the family was upstairs. Sam was down in his man cave, sitting in front of his eighty-five-inch big-screen television and holding the remote control. He wasn’t watching a game or a movie or even idly flicking through the channels. Instead, he was surfing online porn, trying to choose a scene out of the seemingly infinite number available. He just couldn’t help himself.

Meanwhile, busy with dinner preparations, Krissy passed by the window to the downstairs room. She saw Sam and what he was watching. He had thought it was his secret sexual habit. But she knew about it. She had even asked him to stop twice before. He had assured her that he had. But he hadn’t. Now she was at a loss, feeling betrayed and overwhelmed. The next day, Krissy confronted him. “Is this the cause of the problems in our relationship?” she wondered aloud. “Is this why we’ve grown so distant?” She told Sam that he needed to get help, or she was leaving.

She came to suspect that porn had deeply impacted their marriage, and they’d had no idea. Sam wouldn’t come to recognize this for quite some time.